

Legislation aims to prevent another Graniteville-type accident by upgrading security regulations for shipment of hazardous materials in the 2005 Homeland Security Authorization Bill

Washington, DC - As the U.S. House of Representatives prepares to consider this year's Homeland Security Authorization Bill, 12th District Congressman John Barrow (D-GA) today called on Congress to amend the bill to include tough new rail security measures that would help better protect local communities from the shipment of extremely hazardous materials.

"Each and every day, hazardous materials are shipped through towns and cities all across our country," Barrow said. "We have a national responsibility to put into place practical and common-sense safeguards that will better protect and prepare our communities in the event of an accident or attack. We can't afford to sit by and let another Graniteville-type accident happen again."

Since taking office in January, Barrow has met with numerous rail safety officials to get their input on ways to improve shipment of the hazardous materials in the wake of the Graniteville accident. Those meetings have included representatives from the rail industry, the Department of Transportation, the Federal Rail Administration, and the Department of Homeland Security.

In fact, Barrow's first meeting as a Member of Congress was with Secretary of Transportation

Norm Mineta.

“My legislation addresses a number of concerns shared during meetings I've held over the last few months,” Barrow said. “It's shocking to discover that so many common-sense safeguards have not been implemented to address rail safety in this country. This amendment is the first step in a series of legislative priorities that I'm working on to make sure that the shipment of hazardous materials is done as safely as possible.”

The safeguards Barrow proposed are specifically targeted at the shipment of toxic inhalation gases such as chlorine, as well as materials that are extremely flammable or highly explosive. Speaking before the House Rules Committee, Barrow was joined by Congressman Edward Markey to argue for the new safety standards. The Barrow-Markey Amendment seeks to strengthen the Homeland Security Authorization bill (H.R. 1817) by:

- Developing new technologies to make tanker cars more resistant to punctures;
- Establishing physical security measures such as secondary containment, extra security guards, and surveillance technologies,
- Improving coordination and communication plans involving law enforcement, first responders, and shipping industries,

- Requiring pre-notification of local law enforcement when hazardous materials are being shipped through their communities;
- Rerouting of hazardous material shipments around areas of concern ONLY when a safer route exists; and
- Providing better training for personnel working with hazardous material shipments.

The Barrow-Markey Amendment would also provide new whistleblower protections for individuals or employees who face retaliation for disclosing violations of any security rules or regulations.

“This legislation seeks to address two key components of Homeland Security: protecting our nation's transportation routes and ensuring the safety of our communities,” Barrow said. “It's critically important that we make local law enforcement officials aware of hazardous shipments coming through their communities, and that we increase our efforts to help first responders react quickly, safely, and correctly to any accidents or spills.”

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